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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the current state of outdoor education in primary schools in England and Wales and presents arguments to counter current constraints on its provision. Within the national curriculum, outdoor education has been interpreted in the sense of "outdoor and adventurous activities" and, as a result of recent pruning, is now confined to a very small part of the official primary curriculum for children over 7 years of age. Nevertheless, closer scrutiny of the national curriculum reveals real opportunity for outdoor education, and some primary schools have developed effective and imaginative outdoor practices. Examples are given of potential outdoor activities related to math, science, craft and technology, history, geography, art, music, physical education, and English. A sample outdoor education syllabus is outlined for grades 1-6. Six attitudes and misconceptions that constrain delivery of outdoor education at the primary level are discussed and refuted. These are: (1) desires to focus school efforts on passing inspections and to be uncontroversial; (2) perceived lack of outdoor education skills in teachers; (3) perceived need for expensive equipment; (4) fears about the risks of outdoor education; (5) perception that outdoor education is irrelevant; and (6) perception that primary-aged children are too young for outdoor education. (Contains 17 references.) (SV)

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The Scope for Provision of Outdoor Education in Primary Schools - an English Case Study

by
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Richard Lemmey

The Scope for Provision of Outdoor Education in Primary Schools - an English Case Study.

Outdoor education is 'dangerous'. Such is the perception of many legislators, teachers and parents, but as in the concept of 'danger', the terms 'real' and 'apparent' are relevant and help provide insight into the current state of outdoor education in primary schools in England and Wales.

To people who are not involved in the outdoors, outdoor education in the U.K. is often perceived either in terms of its portrayal in the press(Lyme Bay Tragedy. Daily Express,March 23rd,1993.p1. Evening Standard March 23rd,1993.p1) - in the context of accidents to school parties - or in terms of its history - in the context of Baden-Powell, Kurt Hahn, Sir Edmund Hilary or the Duke of Edinburgh. Thus it becomes associated with risk-oriented extra-mural activities for secondary school children and the legislation recently passed to regulate such activities (The Activity Centres[Young Person's Safety] Act, 1995) further reinforces the notion that outdoor education is somehow dangerous. Primary outdoor educators therefore find themselves harmonising parents' interpretation of what outdoor education appears to be with what it really can be. They are further constrained as to what outdoor education can be, by the requirements of the National Curriculum, where again the perception of being 'dangerous' is reinforced by the introduction of the term 'outdoor and adventurous activities' which are now only available in a reduced form as part of the Physical Education National Curriculum prescribed for children over 7 years of age.

The National Curriculum in England and Wales consists of three core subjects - english, maths and science - and seven foundation subjects - history, geography, physical education, art, music, information technology and craft, design and technology with compulsory religious education. Statutorily, the National Curriculum occupies 80% of a school's timetable theoretically allowing the school to create its own curriculum in the remaining 20%. Funding is related to the number of children attending the school which is influenced by parents' perceptions of the school which is heavily affected in turn by the report of the OFSTED school inspector (Office for Standards in Education). Such is the climate of anxiety regarding funding that the 20% discretionary time is spent preparing for or responding to inspection needs which usually centre around core subjects. Within the statutory 80% further emphasis has recently been put on the teaching of literacy and numeracy, taking the emphasis even further away from foundation subjects and extra-mural activities. Within the National Curriculum therefore outdoor education has been interpreted in the sense of 'outdoor and adventurous activities' and, as a result of recent pruning, is now confined to one very small part of the primary curriculum for children over seven years of age.

Superficial inspection of the National Curriculum and the school timetable would indicate an 'apparent' lack of outdoor education at primary level.

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Within outdoor education definitions abound and it has been described variously. '*Outdoor Education is not a subject, but an approach to education which is concerned with the overall development of young people*' (National Curriculum Physical Education Working Party.1991)

'*Outdoor Education follows the experiential philosophy of learning by doing. It takes place principally, but not exclusively, through involvement with the natural environment. In outdoor education the emphasis for a subject of learning is placed on relationships concerning people and natural resources*'. (Priest & Gass 1998).

A wide range of views are found amongst primary outdoor practitioners but most would consider that both an 'approach to education' and an 'outdoor adventure' interpretation would have relevance to work with primary children.

Closer scrutiny of the National Curriculum reveals 'real opportunity' for outdoor education at the primary level and some schools show 'real practice' taking place in effective and imaginative ways. The curriculum itself is defined in terms of Programmes of Study and Attainment Targets and both yield interesting opportunities to an outdoor practitioner with imagination. The following are examples taken from the curriculum which might be accommodated within an outdoor programme.

Maths: Problem-solving. Shapes, space and measurement. Collecting and gathering data. Application of numeracy.

Science: 'Exploration', '...care and sensitivity to the environment', 'describe phenomena', 'recognise hazards and risks', 'explore using the appropriate senses', 'the relationship between exercise and food', 'push and pull forces', 'darkness and light', 'sound in different environments', '...different living things live in different places e.g. woods and ponds.'

Craft, Design and Technology: Designing, making and testing.

History: Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, local history and recent history through role-play and visits to sites.

Geography: Recognise and make observations about physical features, express views on the environment, understand the distinctive nature of the location, scale, environmental improvement and damage, investigation skills.

Art: Record what they see and touch. Imaginative use of materials.

Music: The effect of time and place on music. Song.

Physical Education: Running, chasing, dodging, awareness of space, travelling on

hands and feet, turning, rolling, swinging, climbing, control, coordination, balance, patterns, moods and feelings, orienteering (7-11 yr olds only) in parks, woods or on the shore, and problem solving.

English: 'Talk with confidence about issues of immediate interest', 'talk and listen in different contexts', application of literacy skills, creative writing.

Such curricular content as outlined above applies, except where stated, to five to eleven year olds. In the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority's statement on Nursery Education: Desirable Outcomes for Children' Learning (1995. pp2-4) similar possibilities are clearly obvious. The following words and phrases occur:

Confident movement, basic physical skills, climbing, explore colour, sound, texture and type in two and three dimensions, see, hear, smell, touch, feel, express ideas and communicate feelings, sensitive to the needs and feelings of others, confident, have self-respect.

It can therefore be seen that even within the legislation there is 'real' opportunity to apply the potency of outdoor education and fortunately there are examples of 'real' good practice. The following is taken from the statement of aims in the outdoor education policy document of a primary school (Windermere Junior School Outdoor Education Policy 1996. p1) that uses the whole range of outdoor experience to enrich the learning of children within the school.

The school aims to use Outdoor Education experiences to enhance the learning process across the whole curriculum. We see it as an approach to education which is essentially cross-curricular rather than as a curriculum area in its own right.

We believe that Outdoor Education can make a contribution to the school curriculum in two distinct ways.

Firstly as part of the National Curriculum. The Outdoor Education element of the PE National Curriculum recognises the key role which adventurous experiences play in the development of children's physical, mental and spiritual well-being. In addition carefully planned, progressive Outdoor Education experiences, together with the appropriate preparation and follow-up, can be used to implement Programmes of Study and meet Attainment Targets in other subjects (particularly Maths and Geography) in a lively and motivating way.

Secondly as a means of developing key personal and social qualities in children. In recognising the significance of this second area we are in accord with one of the stated aims of the National Curriculum -

'to develop in pupils those personal qualities which cannot be written into a programme of study or an Attainment Target.'

and with the views of the Elton Report(Discipline in School 1989. p13) which stressed-

> *'the importance of personal and social education as a means of promoting the values of mutual respect, self-discipline and social responsibility which underlie good behaviour.'*

The policy goes on to explore issues such as skills, activities, equal opportunities, assessment, evaluation, safety, consent, planning, staffing, parental involvement, other agencies, bad weather, emergency procedures, First Aid, equipment and consent forms.

What is characteristic of good practice in outdoor education in primary schools is that it is truly cross-curricular and forms part of an integrated progression. An example of a primary school's outdoor education syllabus might therefore look something like this:

Year One	Dance stimulated by the environment. Art using natural materials. Collecting and sorting outdoors. Nature Walk.
Year Two	Exploring the woods. Watching the Weather. 'Where's Teddy' orienteering.
Year Three	Map Games. Local History Trail. Introduction to outdoor orienteering.
Year Four	Exercise outdoors. Environmental awareness. Orienteering. Making Parish Maps.
Year Five	Orienteering competitions. Using stoves and cooking outdoors. Shelter design and building. Residential: canoeing, orienteering and low level walk. Local History: The Evacuees.
Year Six	Problem-solving outdoors. Orienteering. Residential: Canoeing, gorge walk, high level walk. Self-Reliant Journey: Unaccompanied journey from the centre to home, shadowed in secret by adults, for a selected few.

Whilst no scheme can ever be completely cross-curricular, as a consequence of limitations such as staff skills and the emphasis of the school some aspects of the National Curriculum can be particularly difficult to incorporate within outdoor education programmes. One such area is information technology. Obvious applications exist with the handling of data derived from the outdoors or through the use of the internet (e.g. weather maps) but original and unusual applications can arise as the following example demonstrates.

A group of teachers at the Lakes Comprehensive Secondary School, Windermere, involved with a class of eleven year olds had been observing that the behaviour and decisions being made by the children in the context of problem-solving fantasy stories and problem-solving computer games were markedly different. Both contexts were similar in that they involved the notions of fantasy and nearly always took place in outdoor settings. The children clearly recognised these differences but were also very insistent about the decisions they made although they were clearly unrealistic. It was clear to the staff that the children's perspectives of their own capabilities were similarly unrealistic.

The notion of making a problem solving triangle between text, computer and outdoor experience was proposed to present the children with an opportunity to realise the differences between their reactions in the three contexts. This was carried out in a wood with a stream, fallen trees, tracks and some old but safe quarry workings. A suitable tale was woven with 'travellers', 'hermits', 'ancient parchments', cloaks, lamps and a heavy dose of legend.

Needless to say the transformation in the children's perceptions of their strengths, self-esteem and potential was striking and universally positive. This scheme in itself grew into a larger curriculum project but it none the less illustrates how outdoor educational opportunities can arise unexpectedly from small beginnings, which with a little imagination, few skills and almost no equipment have a profound effect on children's learning.

The scope and potency of outdoor education in primary schools is acknowledged (National Curriculum Council,1990) but its provision is variable for the following reasons:-

1. The desire to focus efforts on passing inspections and be uncontroversial.

2. The perceived lack of outdoor education skills in teachers.

3. The perceived need for expensive equipment.

4. The fear that outdoor education is dangerous.

5. The perception that outdoor education is irrelevant.

6. The perception that primary aged children are too young.

In certain circumstances any of the reasons may be valid but in general they are commonly held mis-conceptions. The conception that outdoor education diverts schools away from and reduces the chances of passing an OFSTED inspection is not born out by the experience of Cumbria schools in which there are a number of schools where inspectors have commented positively about the outdoor education provision. It may well be that the inclusion of outdoor education is an indicator of an imaginative, energetic and outward looking school.

Teachers tend to over estimate the skills required to teach primary level outdoor education. Residential experiences are an appropriate way of by-passing this positively but In-Service Training and parental assistance can provide all that is needed in the first instance.

The expense of equipment may be less of a limiting factor once the specialist skill activities have been fulfilled by residential visits to centres where the 'fear of danger' element is transferred to trained specialists. Old ropes, spars, plastic drums and

sheeting can support an exciting school-based scheme usually costing little more than a phonecall.

Outdoor education can be demonstrated to be relevant by reference to the National Curriculum and examples of good practice. Further, its added value lies, as has been indicated by OFSTED inspectors, in how it goes beyond the subject curriculum and contributes to the social, moral and spiritual development of children. In terms of teacher motivation this is probably the most significant of its contributions.
Can children be too young to be involved in outdoor education? Children will natural-

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ly explore their immediate environments and from day one this will involve risks. The argument for guiding and guarding them as they do this and ensuring they get the most out of the experience is obvious. The justification for this extends from Aristotle, through Rousseau(1726), Froebel(1826), Baden-Powell(1908), Dewey(1938), Freire(1972), and Hodgkin(1985) to Mortlock(1984) - amongst many others.

Given all these apparent concerns and restrictions, outdoor education is widespread in English and Welsh primary schools but to varying degrees. Where it is prominent, it is alive and well and in the hands of enthusiasts. Its demands and risks are accepted and used imaginatively. How else would we want it to be? As a counter to the unimaginative, risk-avoiding and unenthusiastic approaches engendered by the worst of the National Curriculum and OFSTED its role is perhaps more significant in maintaining what might be regarded as 'the bio-diversity of the educational rainforest'.

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